

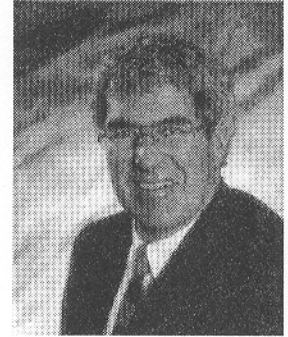
ATTORNEY GENERAL

STATE OF MONTANA

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Fellow Montanans:

Each day, the Montana Highway Patrol protects and assists Montana motorists through enforcement, education and prevention. Annual statistics from the MHP also offer a clear picture of many of the challenges facing the men and women of the Patrol.

The 2003 Montana Legislature addressed some of those challenges. Legislators made a number of improvements to the state's DUI laws, including lowering the blood-alcohol level threshold to .08, down from .10. Lawmakers also increased sentences for repeat offenders. A statewide open container ban did not pass.

I am especially proud of our efforts to promote legislation that prohibits racial profiling. The new law establishes formal policies and procedures to guarantee law enforcement agencies do not use race or ethnicity as the basis for an arrest or traffic stop.

Regrettably, lawmakers did not pass a primary seatbelt law. Although seatbelt use improved in 2002 and has improved continually since 1998, I am confident a primary law would nonetheless go a long way toward reducing injuries and fatalities on Montana roads. Last year, 179 drivers and passengers lost their lives when they failed to use a seatbelt. We can still do better. Buckling up remains the simplest, quickest thing Montana drivers and passengers can do to protect themselves.

With these and other changes to Montana law and the continued good work of its officers, the Montana Highway Patrol looks forward to its birthday in 2003. I commend the men and women of the Patrol in their efforts to keep Montana roadways safe.

Very truly yours,

A stylized, handwritten signature of Mike McGrath in dark ink.

Mike McGrath
Attorney General